

Periphrastic prospective aspect constructions in Dutch and German

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Some quick examples

(1) the ship *is about to sail* (Comrie 1976:64)

(2) the ship *is on the point of sailing* (Ibid.)

“temporal phase located close before the initial boundary of [a given] situation [...] with (crucially) no implication about whether the situation actually occurred or not” (Kuteva et al. 2019:859)



Also: *be going to* (Declerck et al. 2006:358), *be on one's way/road to* (Van Rompaey et al. 2015),
be on the verge/brink of...

What is prospective aspect?

- (1) the ship *is about to sail*
- (2) the ship *is on the point of sailing*

Situation aspect: Lexicalized by V(P)
 most canonically *State/Activity/Accomplishment/Achievement/Semelfactive*
 (i.a. Vendler 1967; Dowty 1979; Verkuyl 1993; Tenny 1994; Smith 1997)

Viewpoint aspect: Morphosyntax/Constructions on top of V(P)
 e.g. *Progressive/Ingressive/Egressive/Completive/Continuative/Resumptive/Perfective/Prospective*

☞ Interaction between two levels = crucial: Selection & Shift (de Swart 1998; Boogaart 2004; Michaelis 2004)

Toolkit: Phases φ and boundaries τ along temporal axis t (i.a. Bickel 1997; Sasse 2002:222-225; Bogaards 2022a)
 + focus/saliency (e.g. Langacker 2008)

What is prospective aspect?

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Toolkit: Phases φ and boundaries τ along temporal axis t (i.a. Bickel 1997; Sasse 2002:222-225; Bogaards 2022a)
 + focus/saliency (e.g. Langacker 2008)

- Ingressive $\neg\varphi$ τ φ (3) Tina **starts** singing.
- Egressive φ τ $\neg\varphi$ (4) Tina **stops** singing.
- Resumptive $\neg\varphi$ τ $\neg(\neg\varphi)$ (5) Tina **resumes** singing.
- Prospective $\neg\varphi$ τ φ (6) Tina **is about to** sing.

Compatibility with τ -focused viewpoints:

- (7) Tina is about to **<start>** **<stop>** **<resume>** singing.

What is prospective aspect?

- (1) the ship *is about to sail*
 (2) the ship *is on the point of sailing*

- Prospective $\neg\varphi \tau \varphi$ (6) *Tina is about to sing.*

“no implication about whether the situation actually occurred” (Kuteva et al. 2019:859)

“underspecifying [the situation’s] realization” (Bogaards 2022b)

👉 Modal POSS(ibility) operator: $(\varphi_1 \& \text{POSS}(\neg\varphi_2 \tau \varphi_2))$

- Pre-state φ_1 [Initial state $\neg\varphi_2 \tau$ Result state φ_2]
 (Fleischhauer et al. 2019:7)
- $\varphi_1 = \neg\varphi_2$ (event participant, state type)
- $\varphi_1 <_t (\neg\varphi_2 \tau \varphi_2)$

Prospective constructions

$$(\varphi_1 \text{ \& } \text{POSS}(\neg\varphi_2 \tau \varphi_2))$$

Prospective (i.a. Anderson 1973; Comrie 1976; Dahl 1985; Jendraschek 2014; Fleischhauer & Gamerschlag 2019), **but also** *proximative* (König 1993; Heine 1994; Kuteva et al. 2019), *imminent* (Van Rompaey et al. 2015), *futurish* (Declerck et al. 2006)

Restrictions—to do with Change of State (CoS):

- **Tok Pisin** (Creole, Papua New Guinea): prospective *laik* (with human subject) restricted to certain CoS verbs (Romaine 1999:33)
- Similar CoS restriction in **Maa** (Nilo-Saharan) (König 2000:146)
- **English** [*be on one's way/road to V*] prefers transitional predicates (CoS) (Van Rompaey et al. 2015:256)
- **German** [*stehen vor NP*] takes a CoS-denoting noun (Fleischhauer et al. 2019; Fleischhauer & Gamerschlag 2019)
- **Dutch** [*op (het punt van) V staan*] is restricted to intransitive Achievements (CoS) (Bogaards 2022b)

👉 **CoS-hypothesis:** *Prospective aspect is restricted to CoS-denoting expressions.*

Prospective constructions

$$(\varphi_1 \ \& \ \text{POSS}(\neg\varphi_2 \ \tau \ \varphi_2))$$

☞ **CoS-hypothesis:** *Prospective aspect is restricted to CoS-denoting expressions.*

German [*davor stehen zu VP*] & Dutch [*op het punt staan (om) te VP*]

Little variation (cf. English) and structural similarity (*stehen/staan*)

Gap: No comparative research on prospectivity in Germanic

Question: Does the CoS-hypothesis apply to these constructions?
(Backdrop: is it representative of the general selectional preferences of prospective constructions?)

Method: Comparative corpus study

Prospectivity in German and Dutch

$$(\varphi_1 \ \& \ \text{POSS}(\neg\varphi_2 \ \tau \ \varphi_2))$$

German [*davor stehen zu* VP]

Variable infinitive, ‘lit. *in front stand to*’

- (8) *Der Planet Krypton stand kurz davor zu explodieren*. ‘The planet Krypton is on the verge of exploding.’ (A15/NOV.02629 St. Galler Tagblatt, 07.11.2015, S. 17; Tatort: Schwanensee ARD 20.15)

Cf. nominal strategy [*stehen vor NP*]
‘lit. stand in front of NP’

- (9) *Fast ein Dutzend Flüssiggasbehälter stand kurz vor der Explosion*. ‘Almost a dozen liquid gas containers were on the verge of exploding.’ (NUZ09/DEZ.02482 Nürnberger Zeitung, 24.12.2009, S. 9; Massiver Brand im „Barockhäusle“ – Gasflaschen kurz vor der Explosion)

Dutch [*op het punt staan (om) te* VP]

Variable infinitive, ‘lit. *on the point stand to*’

- (10) *Alex [stopt] de dood van Clear door haar te redden uit een auto die op het punt stond te ontploffen*. ‘Alex prevents Clear’s death by saving her from a car on the verge of exploding.’ (SoNaR WR-P-P-G-0000203156)

Cf. nominal strategy [*op (het punt van) [VP]_N staan*]
‘lit. on (the point of) stand’

- (11) *Alf is gevlucht van zijn thuisplaneet Melmak omdat deze op het punt van ontploffen stond*. ‘Alf fled his home planet Melmak because it was on the verge of exploding.’ (SoNaR WR-P-E-J-0000039536)
- (12) *Het leek wel alsof de woning op ontploffen stond*. ‘It seemed as though the house was on the verge of exploding.’ (SoNaR WR-P-P-G-0000366175)

Corpus extraction

German

German reference corpus (DeReKo)

Archives Tagged-C & Tagged-C2

Search string:

```
(&stehen /0s,Max (davor /0s,Max (zu
/+1:1w,Max #ELEM(ANA='V' ANA='INF'))))
```

“every occurrence of finite *stehen* together with *davor*, *zu* and an infinitive within the same sentence”

Tagged-C	397 hits
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Tagged-C2	783 hits
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Total	1,180 hits
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German [*davor stehen zu VP*]

Dutch [*op het punt staan (om) te VP*]

Dutch

SoNaR corpus of contemporary written Dutch

5 search strings (separate for clause type (main/sub) & tense (simple/compound))—examples:

```
[ "op" ] [ "het" ] [ "punt" ] [ lemma="staan"&pos="WW.pv.*" ]
[ pos!="LET.*" ] {0,9} [ "te" ] [ pos="WW.inf.*" ]
```

“every occurrence of *op het punt* + finite *staan* separated by 0-9 tokens (not punctuation) from *te* + infinitive”

```
[ "op" ] [ "het" ] [ "punt" ] [ lemma="hebben" ]
[ lemma="staan"&pos="WW.vd.*" ] [ pos!="LET.*" ] {0,8}
[ "te" ] [ pos="WW.inf.*" ]
```

“every occurrence of *op het punt* + finite *hebben* + infinite *staan* separated by 0-8 tokens (not punctuation) from *te* + infinitive”

Total	3,262 hits
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Corpus extraction

German

Tagged-C	397 hits
Tagged-C2	783 hits
Total	1,180 hits

Two steps:

1. Does *davor* belong to *stehen*?

Yes	No
927	253

2. Can *stehen* be substituted by e.g. *sitzen* 'sit' or *lokalisiert sein* 'be localized'?

Yes	No
81	846

👉 **876** prospective constructions
(some sentences have more than one)

German [*davor stehen zu VP*]

Dutch [*op het punt staan (om) te VP*]

Dutch

Total	3,262 hits
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Same two steps in one go:

Does *op het punt* belong to *staan*?

Is it impossible to substitute *staan* for *zijn* 'be'?

2xYes	<2xYes
3,174	88

👉 3,174 prospective constructions

👉 Random sample of **876** items taken for comparability and manageability

Corpus overview

German [*davor stehen zu VP*]

Dutch [*op het punt staan (om) te VP*]

German 📌 **876** prospective constructions
(some sentences have more than one)

Dutch 📌 Random sample of **876** items taken for
comparability and manageability

	German	Dutch
Tokens	876	876
Types	381	452
TTR	43.5%	51.6%
Hapaxes	253	247

Corpus overview

German [*davor stehen zu VP*]
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German	n (%)	Dutch	n (%)
<i>werden</i> 'become'	71 (8.1%)	<i>worden</i> 'become'	41 (4.7%)
<i>übernehmen</i> 'take over'	40 (4.5%)	<i>vertrekken</i> 'leave'	34 (3.9%)
<i>verlieren</i> 'lose'	30 (3.4%)	<i>gaan</i> 'go'	31 (3.5%)
<i>erreichen</i> 'reach'	21 (3%)	<i>trouwen</i> 'marry'	18 (2.1%)
<i>verkaufen</i> 'sell'	19 (2.2%)	<i>beginnen</i> 'begin'	15 (1.7%)

Corpus annotation

$(\varphi_1 \ \& \ \text{POSS}(\neg\varphi_2 \ \tau \ \varphi_2))$

German [*davor stehen zu VP*]

Dutch [*op het punt staan (om) te VP*]

Telicity: attainment of some result state ($=\tau \ \varphi_2$)

Not all CoS-verbs are necessarily telic—e.g. *grow, cool, develop* (Dowty 1979; Bertinetto & Squartini 1994)

Established criteria for identifying telic predicates applied to the VP **in isolation:**

1. Compatible with time span ADV (e.g. *in einer halben Stunde/binnen een halfuur*)

(13) *Die Angreifer zerstörten das Haus [in nur einer halben Stunde].*
‘The attackers destroyed the house [in just half an hour].’

2. Incompatible with durative ADV (e.g. *eine halbe Stunde lang/een halfuur lang*)

(14) *Dit kind vernietigt alle leven op aarde [#een halfuur lang].*
‘This child is destroying all life on earth [#for half an hour].’ (SoNaR WR-P-E-G-0000011544)

 Annotation in terms of telic/atelic/unclear **types**

Results: Telicity

$(\varphi_1 \& \text{POSS}(\neg\varphi_2 \tau \varphi_2))$

German [*davor stehen zu VP*]

Dutch [*op het punt staan (om) te VP*]

👉 Annotation in terms of telic/atelic/unclear types

	German	Dutch
Telic	300 (78.8%)	350 (77.4%)
Atelic	59 (15.5%)	82 (18.1%)
Unclear	22 (5.7%)	20 (4.4%)

(Cf. German [*stehen vor NP*]: 80% CoS-denoting (Fleischhauer 2022))

Results: Atelic predicates

German	n	Dutch	n
<i>machen</i> 'do, make'	10	<i>doen</i> 'do'	14
<i>spielen</i> 'play'	5	<i>aanslag plegen</i> 'attack'	5
<i>sein</i> + A/Prt. 'be'	5	<i>aanvallen</i> 'attack'	3
<i>riskieren</i> 'risk'	3	<i>gebeuren</i> 'happen'	3
<i>präsentieren</i> 'presenteren'	2	<i>kussen</i> 'kiss'	3
<i>bitten</i> 'beg'	2	<i>uitbarsten</i> 'erupt'	3
<i>feiern</i> 'celebrate'	2	<i>bellen</i> 'call'	2

German [*davor stehen zu VP*]

Dutch [*op het punt staan (om) te VP*]

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German corpus items

Activity:

- (15) *Man sieht ja, wie knapp wir **davor standen, in der Europa League zu spielen.***

'As you can see, we are short for playing in the Europa league.'
(M12/MAI.01243 Mannheimer Morgen, 04.05.2012, S. 10; Berlin nicht Thema Nr. 1)

State:

- (16) *Die lange angekündigte Sitzgruppe **stehe kurz davor, fertig zu sein [...].***

'The long-promised table set is about to be complete.'
(RHZ14/FEB.23887 Rhein-Zeitung, 24.02.2014, S. 15; Ausblick auf Rheinbogen sichergestellt)

Results: Atelic predicates

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Dutch corpus items

Activity:

- (17) *Ik **stond op het punt om naar huis te bellen** om te zeggen dat ik terugkwam, [...].*
'I was about to call home to say I was coming back.'
(SoNaR WR-P-P-G-0000222574)

State:

- (18) *Voor ik aan deze tocht begon, had ik het gevoel dat ik **op het punt stond** het complex van schuld en schuldgevoelens **te begrijpen** [...].*
'Before starting this journey, I felt like I was on the verge of understanding the complex of guilt.' (SoNaR WR-P-P-B-0000000161)

	German	Dutch
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German [*davor stehen zu VP*]

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Results: Atelic predicates

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‘Before starting this journey, I felt like I was on the verge of understanding the complex of guilt.’ (SoNaR WR-P-P-B-000000161)

 Prospective construction construes onset of Activity/State

German [*davor stehen zu VP*]

Dutch [*op het punt staan (om) te VP*]

$(\varphi_1 \ \& \ \text{POSS}(\neg\varphi_2 \ \tau \ \varphi_2))$

Results: Atelic predicates

☞ Prospective construction construes onset of Activity/State

Dutch likes to do this with an ingressive auxiliary or lexical item:

(19) [...], *alsof hij op het punt stond op de klanken van sabbatpsalmen te **gaan dansen***.
 ‘as if he was about to start dancing to the sounds of sabbath psalms.’
 (SoNaR WR-P-P-B-0000000181)

(20) *In de jaren zestig zagen ze eruit alsof ze op het punt stonden **in een dans uit te barsten***.
 ‘In the sixties they looked as though they were about to burst out into a dance.’
 (SoNaR WR-P-P-H-0000033953)



In general, Dutch combines with more (ingressive) auxiliaries than German in this construction

German [*davor stehen zu VP*]Dutch [*op het punt staan (om) te VP*] $(\varphi_1 \ \& \ \text{POSS}(\neg\varphi_2 \ \tau \ \varphi_2))$

Results: Auxiliaries

In general, Dutch combines with more (ingressive) auxiliaries than German in this construction...

German	n	Dutch	n
Passive <i>werden/bekommen/sein</i>	37	Passive <i>worden</i>	60
Modal <i>können</i> ‘can’	18	Ingressive <i>gaan</i> ‘go’	19
Modal <i>müssen</i> ‘must’	5	Causative <i>laten</i> ‘let’	5
Modal <i>dürfen</i> ‘may’	2	Egressive <i>stoppen</i> ‘stop’	1
Total	62	Total	85

...whereas the German pattern also selects modals, contrary to Dutch

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...whereas the German pattern also selects modals, contrary to Dutch

German [*davor stehen zu VP*]

Dutch [*op het punt staan (om) te VP*]

$(\varphi_1 \ \& \ \text{POSS}(\neg\varphi_2 \ \tau \ \varphi_2))$

In Dutch, presence of an ingressive auxiliary is associated with atelicity...

	Atelic	Telic
Ingressive auxiliary	15	3
No ingressive auxiliary	67	347

Association between presence of ingressive auxiliary and atelicity is significant ($\chi^2=46.31$, $df=1$, $p<0.001$), with moderate effect size (Cramer's $V=0.33$).

...yet, ingressive marking on atelic VPs forms only ~18% of atelic cases

Results: States

In general, Dutch combines with more (ingressive) auxiliaries than German in this construction...

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German [*davor stehen zu VP*]

Dutch [*op het punt staan (om) te VP*]

$(\varphi_1 \ \& \ \text{POSS}(\neg\varphi_2 \ \tau \ \varphi_2))$

On the other hand, German features more States, including copulas like *sein* and *bleiben*:

German	n	Dutch	n
<i>sein</i> + A/Prt. 'be'	5	<i>begrijpen</i> 'understand'	1
<i>bleiben</i> + A/Prt. 'remain'	2	<i>bewonderen</i> 'admire'	1
<i>stehen</i> 'stand'	2	<i>denken dat</i> 'think that'	1
<i>haben</i> 'have'	2	<i>gloeien</i> 'glow'	1
<i>sitzen</i> 'sit'	1	<i>knielen</i> 'kneel'	1
<i>jmd. für etwas halten</i> 'consider sb. to be'	1	<i>winst maken</i> 'be profitable'	1
<i>komisch finden</i> 'find odd'	1	<i>van geluk proeven</i> 'taste happiness'	1
		<i>profiteren</i> 'benefit'	1
Total	11	Total	8

Conclusion

German [*davor stehen zu VP*]

Dutch [*op het punt staan (om) te VP*]

	German	Dutch
Tokens	869	876
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Dutch & German: similar yet distinct periphrastic prospective constructions

Probably developed independently, but show striking similarity in synchronic restrictions/distribution

Clear preference for telic predicates (~78%) but—contrary to CoS-hypothesis—also Activities & States (~17%)

Different strategies for dealing with atelic predicates:

- Ingressive auxiliaries/lexical items, e.g. *gaan* ‘go’ (**Dutch**)
- CoS-reading of States like *sein* ‘be’/*haben* ‘have’ (**German**)

$$(\varphi_1 \ \& \ \text{POSS}(\neg\varphi_2 \ \tau \ \varphi_2))$$

Further questions

What motivates the preference (but not categoric restriction) for telic infinitives? (Activities vs. Accomplishments)

Does this preference obtain in other languages, or is it a Dutch/German-specific constructional property?

e.g. Spanish [*estar a punto de VP*] & Portuguese [*estar a ponto de VP*] (cf. Olbertz 1998:37)

Diachronic development of the Dutch & German constructions

Thank you for your attention!



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Thank you for your attention!

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